HUMANISM IN AMERICA

BY

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Humanism in its widest scope is a system of thought in which man's interests and ideals can and must be realized without the interference of God, Absolute, or Nature. Not every humanist will consider this definition adequate. This is especially true of the humanists we shall designate below as "Literary Humanists". Literary humanism maintains that there are three discontinuous levels or spheres within the ambit of human experience. These are the religious, the human, and the natural. In the human sphere, however, man is capable of coping with all human problems. If such be the case, a literary humanist, consequently, can offer no valid reason why he should not be included in the above definition.

Humanism is humanism no matter upon which continent it may appear. We are interested in the American manifestations of this system of thought. Roughly, we may classify American Humanism into four groups or schools. We may speak of Philosophical Humanism, Ethical Humanism, Literary Humanism, and Religious Humanism. Naturally, there will be overlapping of interests. At the same time the headings will indicate the main approach as well as the outstanding contributions of the respective schools of humanism.

I. Philosophical Humanism, or Dethroning the Absolute.

WILLIAM JAMES and JOHN DEWEY are the outstanding American exponents of philosophical humanism. A comprehensive view should include F. C. S. SCHILLER of England. He has been influenced especially by WILLIAM JAMES.
J. A. FAGGINGER AUER, professor of church history in Harvard University and in Tuft's College, has recently written a calm defense in his book: *Humanism States Its Case*. He does not add anything *essentially* new to that already written by JAMES and DEWEY. The only thing new is the method of presentation. Humanism is placed before the bar of human reason. Its opponents defend their case. Then humanism states its case. The outcome of this philosophical court trial, according to AUER, is that Humanism can lay a claim upon adoption as the adequate philosophy for explaining anything human. In passing we may note two things: First, a professor of church history has the inauspicious courage to write that a belief in God is not even necessary for religion. Man is all-sufficient even in his religious life. The second observation is that AUER brings before the bar of reason a philosophy that is essentially irrational. The very attempt to prove humanism is the very denial of its irrational foundation. How can AUER defend an irrational system rationally? How can he defend anything unless such be rational? In refuting his opponent he identifies himself with him in a greater measure than he realizes. They have "reason" in common.

JAMES, SCHILLER, DEWEY, and AUER have at least one tenet of faith in common. According to their way of thinking both the traditional God and the traditional Absolute are nothing more than obsolete concepts. AUER claims that if the absolute is different from man, how can it help us explain the problems of man. If an alien power could invade humanity it would only cause confusion. Only man can explain the things of man 1). Moreover, an absolute, truly absolute, would imply "a block universe", and this in turn would stifle human responsibility and personal initiative. If the absolute is specifically absolute then human endeavor is only a farce. The above evidences certain inaccuracies and limitations on the part of these philosophers. The opposite of a block universe is an open universe. Now, do only these philosophers have an open universe? There is no reason why an Hegelian Idealist may not claim the very same thing. In the final analysis, Dialectical Philosophy may be defined as the evolution of the Absolute. If so,

1) AUER, *op. cit.*, pp. 35 f.